

Vaccines are an inseparable part of our culture. They define our societal identity as much as driving a car or using a cell phone. We take vaccines for granted, accepting as fact most everything we are told about them. Yet, a growing segment of our population is questioning long-held assumptions and rejecting this method of preventative health care.

Ironically, the recent news of whooping cough outbreaks makes us doubt our vaccine program. Most victims of these outbreaks are already vaccinated, leading to the conjecture that the vaccine might not be working. One postulated reason for this is that the disease is mutating and rendering the vaccine less effective.

Another possibility is that we are witnessing the natural ebb and flow of a disease in spite of vaccinating against it for 70 years. According to the news from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, current cases have not yet reached previous levels counted as recently as 2005. Every few years we hear about an increase in cases and then watch them decline.

The glaring question that needs to be answered is simply, if the vaccine was ever considered effective, why hasn't the disease disappeared? We have been vaccinating for it since about 1940. In 1996 the vaccine was replaced with a newer version. In 2005, it was recommended that all people between age 11 and 64 receive boosters. Virtually every school child is vaccinated, so why the outbreaks?

We have increased the number of vaccines and boosters and we are still talking about outbreaks. If the rate of compliance for school children is between 95% and 100%, how could it possibly be the fault of those like me, who reject vaccines? It can't. There are obviously better ways to approach health.

Throughout my 30 year study of the vaccine controversy, I have watched these inconsistencies cast doubt on vaccine science. I have watched parents struggle with their own doubts about this practice. Today, there is a greater increase in awareness of the potential hazards and ineffectiveness of all vaccines.

Contributing to this awareness is the fact that children today receive about three times the number of vaccines their grandparents received and about twice that of their parents. The number of vaccines and the number of booster requirements are crowding the vaccine schedule, helping create a considerable movement to question and reject the practice.

Children are supposed to receive 49 doses of 14 vaccines before they reach age six. By age 18 it jumps to 69 doses. Parents increasingly pick and choose which vaccines they want to give their children. They are claiming exemptions when it comes time for school. This does not stem from ignorance or complacency, rather just the opposite. Parents are worried and rightly so. Since 1986, two billion dollars have been awarded to families suffering vaccine damage or death.

There aren't enough adequate answers to the mounting questions. Why do we need to vaccinate a newborn for a disease most likely to be spread by used needles or sexual activity (hepatitis B), while the vaccine is thought to wear off in as little as 5 or 10 years? Why do we need to vaccinate a 9 year old for a sexually transmitted disease (human papilloma virus) when a pap smear is still considered the best way to prevent cervical cancer? The HPV vaccines are still relatively new. They were rushed to market and have caused many severe reactions.

Why are kids today so sick? Ask any veteran teacher and they will tell you that children were healthier a generation ago. In 2010, USA Today reported that half of our children have suffered some form of chronic illness. Rates of asthma, allergies, ADHD, autism, and diabetes continue to rise. Our children are not healthier in spite of our vaccinating for more diseases with more boosters.

It's legitimate for people to question whether so many vaccines could be trading infectious diseases for the more chronic and less curable. I've heard accounts of hundreds of unvaccinated families. Their children are much healthier than their peers or siblings who are vaccinated. This story plays out repeatedly.

In 2011 a study was published in the peer reviewed journal, *Human & Experimental Toxicology*, exposing the alarming relationship between vaccinating and infant mortality. Of the 34 countries studied, the United States ranked 34th (worst) in infant mortality and topped the list for the most vaccines administered under one year of age. The countries of the world that vaccinated least had the lowest infant mortality and the countries that vaccinated the most had higher rates.

Why are there so many vaccines in the United States? Because in 1986 Congress stepped in and pro-

tected vaccine manufacturers from liability. Corporations cannot be held accountable if the public cannot sue them directly. Under these special circumstances, why wouldn't manufacturers invent more vaccines when their bottom line can never be negatively affected? For this one reason alone, we cannot assume that vaccines are 100% safe and by the outbreaks we certainly cannot assume they are effective.

I doubt vaccines' safety and effectiveness. Many others do too and our ranks are growing.

*Cynthia Cournoyer is the author of What About Immunizations? Exposing the Vaccine Philosophy and has followed the vaccine controversy for 30 years.*